

Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

STATUS

Threatened 

Threatened 



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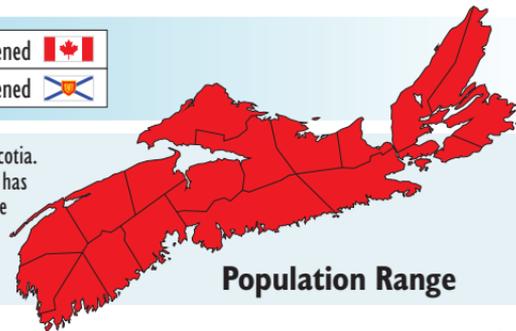
Species Description

The Common Nighthawk is a medium-sized (24 cm) bird, with a large flattened head, large eyes, small bill, and large mouth. It has long slender pointed wings and a long, slightly notched tail. Its dark brown plumage is mottled with black, white, and buff. In flight, adults have a light patch on their throat and a bright white patch across their wings. They make a loud “peent” call in flight, and males make a booming noise with their wings when they dive.



© RONNIE D'ENTREPOINT

Found throughout Nova Scotia. The population in Canada has decreased by 50% over the past 40 years. Winters throughout South America.



Population Range

Habitat

Breeding habitat is varied and includes open areas with little ground vegetation, such as sand dunes, beaches, logged or burned-over areas, forest clearings, rock barrens, peat bogs, and pastures. Nests consist of two eggs laid directly on bare soil, sand, or gravel, or on gravel roof tops.



© MIKE ALLEN

Common Nighthawk Nest



Nighthawks are seen from mid-April through September in open areas at dusk and dawn. Watch and listen for their loud call and diving flight.

Interesting Points

- Only the female incubates the eggs, and the male will feed her.
- They are aerial insectivores (they eat bugs in mid-air) and feed mainly at dusk and dawn in open areas with lots of insects.
- The “night jar” family are also called “goat suckers” because they were believed to drink goat’s milk!
- The booming noises are made by the wings of the male as they pull out of steep dives.



Roosting Common Nighthawks are well camouflaged

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Similar Species

Common Poor-will and Chuck-will's-widow are similar in appearance, but they are very rarely found in Nova Scotia.

Eastern Whip-poor-will (page 37):

Long, black, sensory bristles surround the bill; flatter head; lacks white wing patches.



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Threats to Survival

- Declines of aerial insect prey (habitat acidification, pesticides, light pollution).
- Habitat loss (habitat succession, fire suppression, roof construction changes).
- Accidental mortality (collisions with structures and vehicles on gravel roads).
- Climate change (severe weather events).
- Pollution (mercury, direct effects from pesticides, acid rain).
- Nest predation (cats, raccoons, crows, etc.).



North America at night

How You Can Help

Actively look for this species at dusk and dawn (particularly in June) and report all sightings to eBird. This species loud call and flight pattern make them fairly easy to detect if present. Encourage sustainable land use practices and do not use pesticides. Pet owners can ensure their animals are under control at all times.



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Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca, www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife, www.mba-aom.ca

Sighting Reports: eBird.org, 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings

Stewardship: Bird Studies Canada 1-888-448-2473, www.bsc-eoc.org